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An Employer's View of the Church's Function in Relation to Industry

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THE first duty of the Church in relation to industry is to get to the employer the message sent by Paul to Philemon, the employer of long ago. That message dealt with a laborer, who had struck, walked out, the slave Onesimus, who had run away and had gone to Paul in Rome. Paul sent him back to work with a letter, which said: "Perhaps he departed for a season, that thou shouldst receive him forever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved."

More of the so-called laboring class would be coming to our churches if they had better reason to expect to be able to return with such a message to their employers. And surely more of the so-called capitalist class, who profess to follow Christ, would cease to oppose democracy in industry, if such a message were impressed by the Church, as the word of God, upon their hearts. The message puts the relationship of employer and employee upon an even higher plane than that of the Golden Rule, which applies to all men alike. The employer is to receive the employee "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved." What a solution for strikes!

The next duty of the Church in relation to industry is to get to employer and employee alike, the message which Jesus gave when he washed the feet of His disciples, including those of His betrayer, the night of the betrayal. Jesus said: "Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash

one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." If the spirit of these words were the spirit of the rules of any industrial plant, could there be in it any talk of closed shop, lock-outs or strikes?

The memory of the concern of the public in the price of the output of every industry brings the thought that the Church, to be true to the teaching of the Master, must insist upon the principle voiced by Jesus when He said: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life." Above everything, the Church is called to teach that he who would follow Jesus must place service to the public and to fellow-laborers, whether they be employer or employee, above profits and position.

THE CHURCHES SHOULD PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD

In approaching the question of the Church's function in relation to industry, I am in thorough accord with those who hold that the primary function of the Church is to proclaim God's word, and that the Church treads on dangerous ground when she departs from this duty. I go even further. The Church, I believe, humanly speaking, will be hopelessly lost, if she continually fails to proclaim the whole of God's word. Hence, my vital interest in God's word

in its relation to industry and the message of the Church with reference to this subject.

James says that "the word" is a mirror, in which we, employer and laborer alike, may see ourselves as we really are. He warns of the danger of looking into the mirror by hearing the word, and going away without remembering what we have seen. "Whoso looketh unto the perfect law of liberty," says James, "and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." But does not that which is held before us as "the word," as a mirror, become a dull, cracked and useless thing, in which neither employer nor laborer can see himself, if the Church, whose all-inclusive function it is to hold the mirror before us, neglects to declare the unpalatable truth which James reveals in these simple, unmistakable words?

Go to now, ye rich man, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.

Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

Quite a text for a word from the Church concerning the living wage. And, to make the mirror wholly clear and revealing, the words of Moses, "Thou shalt not lend upon interest to thy brother," should be added. Looking into the mirror so cleansed, the men, who hold that a return upon cold invested dollars must come ahead of the payment of a living wage, which wage would enable little children and a wife

to live without slaving in a mill, might see themselves as their Maker sees them.

The investigation by our government of the death of 1,643 babies in an American factory town in our day shows that the death-rate among the babies in the poorest families was more than four times as high as among those in the highest paid group. The mothers of 267 of the babies had to go out to work during the first year of their babies' lives. These babies died almost like flies, 277.3 per thousand being the death-rate among those whose mothers had to go before they were four months old. The babies in those homes where seven or more families lived huddled together died at the rate of 236.6 per thousand. Former Surgeon General William C. Gorgas has said:

That poverty is the greatest single cause of bad sanitary conditions was very early impressed upon me. If I should go again into a community such as Cuba or Panama, and were allowed to select only one sanitary measure, but were at the same time given power to choose from all sanitary measures, I would select that of doubling wages. This, in my case, is not altogether theory. In our tropical possessions, in Cuba, Porto Rico, the Philippines, Panama, the result has always come about that we have largely increased wages; the result has also come about that in all the cases we have greatly improved sanitation.

PUTTING GOD'S WORD INTO PRACTICE

With millions starving for food in Europe, grain this winter was being burned for fuel in South America and in our western states, because the farmers could not sell the grain for enough to get coal. Millions at home and abroad shivered last winter for lack of fuel. Yet overproduction of coal has been offered as an explanation for the unsatisfactory conditions in the

coal mines. The production of coal, a necessity of life for all, has been stopped in a great number of mines because operators and miners cannot get together and agree upon a living wage for the men who spend a great part of their lives digging, out of sight of the light of day, in order that our factories may run and our furnaces may be fired to warm our homes.

Did not Onesimus, striking long ago, learn something from Paul, which the Church might well say to the striking miners of our day? And did not Paul's letter to capitalist Philemon, begging him to take Onesimus back, "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved," have in it a message for the mine operator and capitalist of this age? The words, "above a servant, a brother beloved," for the striking workman, returning, and the memory of Jesus, God incarnate, washing His servants' feet in order to put an end to a dispute over position and place, would justify the Church in urging something even more than democracy in industry as a method for ending a dispute between capital and labor such as that which has stopped the digging of our coal.

With women and children starving for the lack of the food which has been burned for coal, and with people shivering every winter for the lack of fuel, and with the price of everything being driven up and kept up by the inflated price of coal, is not the Church recreant to her trust, if she fails to point to this needless suffering and to remind both capital and labor that those who would follow Christ are here "not to be served, but to serve, and to give their lives" to save others. America would not have suffered from three thousand strikes a year for the past five years, I venture to say, if all of the prophets in our pulpits had pressed these principles upon their hearers

as diligently as they have pressed the call to the foreign field. I confess myself at a loss to understand the thought of those who question the propriety of the Church speaking more than pious platitudes upon industrial problems of our day.

The Roman Catholic Church in speaking clearly, plainly and fearlessly upon these subjects has added another to the many debts, which we must admit that we owe to that Church, however many we may think her mistakes, and however much we may differ from her members in the expression of our faith.

To me, one of the most hopeful signs of the times is the declaration adopted by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in December 1912.¹

The committee of Christian ministers and laymen who investigated and published the facts of the steel strike was moving in the right direction. I glory and rejoice in the fearless work of these men. But was it not unfortunate that the churches had not gathered the facts and let in the light of God's truth long prior to the strike? Possibly, then, there would have been no strike.

There have been mutterings in our coal fields for years. Conflicting statements have been given to the public again and again. How many of our churches have given careful consideration to the subject? When lives and industries throughout the world are largely dependent upon this one industry, does it not seem that the churches should have a word to say with reference to the conflict between operators and miners, and the interest of the public therein—that word to be based upon carefully ascertained facts? From the bottom of my heart I believe in "foreign missions," but I cannot refrain from saying that the situation in

¹ See, "Policy and Program of the Christian Churches," p. 126.

the coal fields, and similar situations which may arise, demand our attention as Christians just as much as does the foreign field. Therefore I rejoice to see material touching the coal strike and kindred subjects being sent out by the Information Service of the Federal Council of Churches. This information should be placed in the hands of every minister and church official in America, and it should be used by them.

Mr. Seebohm Rowntree, the English manufacturer, in New York last winter, made a statement which indicates how some minds are moving, and to me proclaims the coming dawn. Mr. Rowntree said: "As a follower of Jesus, I cannot go to sleep in comfort at night, until I know that conditions in my plant are such that I should be glad to see any one of my children take any position as a laborer in the plant." I do not know the conditions in Mr. Rowntree's plant, except by hearing that they are exceptionally good, but I know the condition in many coal mines, mills, factories and plants of America. Could we, who know the conditions in these, honestly say that we should be glad to see one of our children "take any position as a laborer in the plant?"

Until all followers of Christ, who employ labor, can honestly make such a declaration, surely it is the duty of the Church to condemn their failure and to call them to repent and take the better way. Otherwise, shall we ever prove that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves, and that we are willing to do

to them as we would have them do to us? More, that we would willingly die for them as did our Saviour?

So long as 6,000,000 unemployed can walk our streets in winter, so long as the majority of the 25,000,000 wage-earners of the United States live in constant fear of unemployment and in dread of the inevitable want for their families, if accident or death removes the wage-earner, so long as there is one cold, hungry child, or one forced to work, or a baby deprived of its mother by the lack of a living wage, so long as babies are dying as the result of industrial conditions, the function of the Church in relation to industry is crystal clear.

This, I conceive to be the all-inclusive function of the Church, to show forth the living Christ, His power, and love in our lives.

No untried path lies before us. Christ has travelled and marked the way with His cross. I know no other for the Church, which He promised should break the very "gates of Hell."

Despite our failures and lack of faith, for ages these gates have been giving, cracking before the slow onward, upward surge of civilization moved by the Church in which works the Spirit of Christ. Has not the time come for the Church, in His name and strength, to smash the gates of the industrial hell on earth and release the mothers and babies, the men, women and children who suffer therein?

This, surely, is the function of the Church.